

## **Answers of TJ Smith for Housing, Trans., and Fair Dev. Forum**

*\*\*Note: Mr. Smith submitted written answers prior to a change in the first question re: impact of COVID-19 on persons who are homeless\*\**

### **Housing, Transportation and Fair Development Mayoral Forum May 19 from 6:00pm to 8:00pm**

1. The COVID-19 crisis threatens tens of thousands of Baltimore City households with eviction, foreclosure, and additional stress on our transportation network. What specific measures would you take to help City residents avoid eviction, foreclosure and additional deterioration of our transportation infrastructure?

*Much like what has been done at the state level and in other jurisdictions, I would immediately issue various orders to protect the citizens of Baltimore.*

*Through the issuance of an Administrative Order, the Maryland Court of Appeals has suspended all evictions and foreclosures until further notice. As Mayor, I would further prohibit the eviction of city residents who have documented hardships due to the COVID-19 crisis. Eligibility requires for commercial and residential tenants would include the following which must be the direct result of the COVID-19 crisis:*

*-Loss of income due to workplace closures*

*-Child care expenditures due to school closures*

*-Health care expenses related to being ill with COVID-19 or caring for a member of the tenant's household or family who is ill with COVID-19*

*-Reasonable expenditures that stem from government-ordered emergency measures*

*I would work with local law enforcement and also request that the sheriff prohibit his/her personnel from participating in any attempts to serve evictions on city residents during the designated time frame.*

*I would issue an order prohibiting the shut-off of any public utilities to city residents during the State of Emergency.*

*We would seek financial assistance and provide guidance to landlords who are caught in the middle of such orders.*

2. Fair Development centers our fundamental needs for housing, health care, work with dignity, education and a sustainable environment, in government housing and economic development policies, thereby advancing dignity for all Baltimore residents. Will your administration advance fair development in environmental policies? If so, will those policies include ending the city's contract with the BRESKO incinerator and fully implementing a Zero Waste plan that will address toxic pollution and waste in the City and how?

*My administration will take a close look at advancing fair development environmental policies. The incinerator is a problem and we need to find a way that will eliminate trash without expelling toxic fumes in our neighborhoods. I believe education is key in working towards our goal of zero waste. I would love to see the contract with BRESCO ended and we will examine a reasonable path forward to ensure we meet our capacity to manage waste. However, more educational efforts on multiple ways to dispose of waste (i.e. composting, recycling) will be part of our overall efforts.*

3. The official count of vacant properties in Baltimore is 16,000. If elected Mayor, will you commit to using the funding and policy tools at your disposal to (a) convert at least 500 more properties a year from vacancy to occupancy, while prioritizing the needs of community residents living in neighborhoods with vacant structures, and (b) support estate planning for elderly residents to reduce the number of properties becoming vacant?

*Vacant properties are a critical issue in Baltimore. Under my administration, we will work to transform vacant housing to homes. Creating programs that partner with lumber yards that will develop kits that will transform a vacant house into a livable home. Estate planning is important and that is something the Registrar of Wills will do in a campaign that educates residents of the importance of a will.*

4. Baltimore City faces a wave of likely eviction actions due to COVID-19, and it is far from ready. Yet, evictions were already a crisis prior to COVID. Approximately 140,000 eviction cases are filed and almost 6,500 families are evicted each year with many becoming homeless. These evictions have a disparate impact on Black households and female-headed households and reinforce segregation. Baltimore Renters United is releasing a report stating that by investing \$5.7 million each year in a right to counsel in evictions, the City and State would realize \$35.6 million in benefits and costs avoided. How will you address evictions and will your plan include a right to counsel in eviction cases?

*All citizens should have the right to counsel when it comes to having a fair defense against eviction. Far too often, a land owner will have legal representation during eviction proceedings, and the renter will go underrepresented because they cannot afford a lawyer. Under my administration, our city would join the list of other major US cities like New York, Philadelphia, Newark, Cleveland and San Francisco - in creating a civil right to counsel in Baltimore.*

*Under the Smith Administration, we will consider a variety of approaches to address affordable housing and eviction prevention. While many of those initiatives are outlined in my answer below regarding affordable housing, I will also look to create a "task force" in Baltimore which will look at best-practices nationwide to address the challenge. I will also charge the task force with reviewing initiatives within the region. In Philadelphia, they created an "Eviction Prevention Project." The program "assists tenants facing eviction through legal representation, financial counseling, a live hotline, a court help center, community training & educational materials." While we have plenty of resources available, we must streamline the process and ensure the target audience is aware of the program's existence.*

5. In 2018, the City made a historic agreement with the Fair Development Roundtable and Community Development Network to fund the Affordable Housing Trust Fund at \$20 million/year. Yet, the revenue actually coming into the fund is far less than promised, and the proposed FY 2021 capital budget for DHCD is almost 40% lower than last year. Would your administration meet the City's obligation to fund the Affordable Housing Trust Fund with at least \$20 million/year without cutting other affordable housing funds and how? What other policies would you promote to support the development of affordable housing as well as ending homelessness?

*I am committed to reviewing all options to prevent homelessness and to provide affordable housing in Baltimore. As previously indicated, we must ensure there are sound metrics in place to achieve real, and sustainable success of any programs that are funded.*

*Under the Smith Administration, we will consider a variety of approaches to address affordable housing. We will create a coalition of stakeholders who will work together to create a strategy - as one community - to address this issue through measured success. We will consider neighborhood revitalization projects through public-private partnerships, incentive programs, the utilization of the affordable housing trust fund, tax incentives, grants, etc. I believe affordable housing can and must be achieved without gentrification. From the homelessness prospective, one approach that I support is the Housing First model. The approach has been incredibly successful in other cities. Lives have been improved and chronic homelessness has been reduced. The approach promotes autonomy while also working to provide health and social service support to those in need.*

6. Light rail has emerged as the most robust generator of economic development across the nation over the last four decades. Seattle, Portland, Los Angeles, Denver, Charlotte, Dallas are excellent examples. How would you direct and encourage Baltimore City and regional housing and development planners to support the completion of the Red Line light rail project in order to achieve improved transit equity, reduced commute times, preservation of affordable housing, and the transformative community economic growth that follows transportation systems anchored by light rail?

*Baltimore will continue to have a seat at the table as we discuss Regional Transportation. I will leverage my relationship with the Governor in an attempt to gain some local control over the mass transit system. I will continue to advocate for innovative transportation opportunities within our city. Partnerships at the state and federal level are critical in advancing any major transportation initiatives. We must work with all stakeholders to devise a plan that is fair, equitable, reliable, and achievable for Baltimore. The red line would have been a game changer for Baltimore. I will continue to advocate for opportunities to resurrect this plan.*

7. In the transportation industry, "Development Follows Rail" is a proven mantra. Accordingly, not one community economic development project is associated with the bus-focused Baltimore Link system. Banks don't invest in bus stops. How would you re-direct or incentivize local and regional housing and development planners to pair transportation and land use in a long-needed, comprehensive development vision for Baltimore that includes emergency measures to provide permanently affordable housing?

*We will have a transit oriented development culture. Part of growing our city is marketing our city. And part of that is connectivity. With local control of some of our mass transit, it will allow us to be more strategic in guiding development in the city. Leveraging existing relationships will be part of my plan to gain some local authority over the mass transit system inside of the city. I don't want Baltimore to mirror Washington D.C. where rents get so high and residents are pushed out of the city. I want our citizens to be able to afford to live in Baltimore and not struggle to pay rent/mortgage. My administration will create a housing task force that will specifically focus on all aspects of rental developments so that we can make the most informed decisions in the best interest of the residents.*

8. Fair Development also demands that the City redress the harms of racism and predatory capitalism in the City's non-participatory budgeting process, the lack of access to capital among Black households and businesses, and the long history of exploitation in the workplace. Will you advance fair development in budgeting, banking, and the workplace? If so, will those policies include A) implementing a participatory and/or legislative budgeting process, B) prioritizing worker co-ops in City contracts, and C) conducting a feasibility study of a public bank in Baltimore City?

*I am open to finding ways to have the citizens of Baltimore involved in the budgetary and legislative process. Additionally, my administration will review the pros and cons of prioritizing worker co-ops for city contracts.*

*The fiscal landscape has drastically changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Deficits will necessitate tough budgetary decisions about essential services and critical infrastructure. Thus, these extraordinary times will also require my administration to make decisions about whether to invest in a feasibility study of a public bank versus other important expenditures to include housing, homelessness and public safety. This is just one unfortunate reality of our current situation.*

9. Baltimore renters are often forced to live in substandard rental housing with mold infestation being one of the more dangerous and unaddressed issues. Some cities like Washington D.C., are exploring comprehensive mold regulations. Other jurisdictions have more rigorous rental licensing laws that do not allow the landlord to choose and hire the inspector charged with inspecting the property before the landlord can get a license. How would you address the serious threats to life, health and safety in Baltimore's rental housing?

*We know there are homes with lead and other dangerous chemicals that need to be remediated. I would advocate for a law that landlords can not hire their inspector. It should be an independent contractor with no skin in the game to inspect their property. We have heard horror stories of tenants who pay rent and are living in substandard conditions. I want our residents to live in a mold free environment and that will be done by my administration. We can do that by requiring regulations into mold and other toxic materials that harm families.*

10. Decades of racial segregation and disinvestment have produced neighborhood and housing conditions that have a negative impact on the physical and mental health of many Baltimore residents every day. The major health institutions in our city can play a more active role in

addressing these issues, in partnership with City government and community-based organizations. Please describe how you as mayor will better align health institutions' support for making measurable improvements in City neighborhoods and housing conditions?

*According to the [Baltimore Sun](#), Maryland hospitals spend \$1.6 billion on community services. Part of this includes free health education and other public health programs. In addition, a portion of the spending also went to providing charitable health care for the poor. Under the Smith Administration, we will have a real strategy to direct these resources to have a true impact on the communities who need it most. We cannot just have these available resources as “line items” without reassessing and evaluating the outcomes. Furthermore, I will deploy Trauma Go teams to neighborhoods where trauma has occurred. Too many times we see violence in neighborhoods and there is no one who comes to check on the victims and the people who live in that community. Children witness violence and no one asks how they are doing. Under my administration, we will work to ensure residents have access to mental health support. We will work with our institutions to devise a plan that will give access to Baltimore City residents.*